

Winter Recreation

Stanislaus National Forest

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Winter recreation offers exploration, exercise and entertainment—for everyone. You can choose Nordic or alpine skiing, sledding, snowboarding, snowshoeing, snowmobiling or just plain old-fashioned snow play. The Stanislaus has opportunities for each of them. While winter's beauty is worth admiring in your enjoyment of any of these pursuits, the principal goal of your winter outing should be to enjoy it safely and without mishap.

Planning Ahead Can Save the Day

Start planning before you leave home. Determine where you want to visit and the best route by which to get there. Check maps and know how to use a compass. It's easy to become disoriented and lose your sense of direction as you are admiring nature. Share your plans with someone back home, so that someone will know when you are overdue to return.

Make a checklist for items of clothing, food and equipment. Pack wisely. Take only that for which you have a practical need or you'll end up carrying your mistakes. Weather changes can be sudden in the Sierra Nevada winter months. The middle of the trip is a bad time to find out that you either aren't equipped to deal with the many changes in circumstance the Forest can present or that you don't have enough food or protective clothing for the situation.

Dress for warmth, wearing lightweight layers of clothing that can be added or removed to adjust for changes in activity level or temperature. There are a number of newer, lightweight materials that afford excellent protection from the elements. Wool clothing is an old, reliable stand-by because it keeps you warm, even when it is damp.

Call the Cal-Trans Road Update System at 1(800) 427-7623 to check for road conditions. California State Highways 4, 108 and 120 are the main corridors through the Stanislaus National Forest. Carry tire chains, ice scrapers and insure that your car has enough anti-freeze protection for the mountain winter season (0 degrees F). Pull off the road when installing chains on your vehicle.

Tips For the Trail

With all that wonderful exercise, you'll want to replace the calories you'll be burning off. Snack often to keep your energy level high. Cheese, dried fruit and nuts are high-energy foods full of nutrients. Drink plenty of water and/or juices, as your body can lose a great deal of fluid (2 to 4 quarts) during a day filled with strenuous activity.

Estimate how long your winter outing will last. Know your start and anticipated end times for your activity. Don't get caught outdoors overnight unless you are adequately prepared.

Know the Area Do's and Don'ts

Take the time to determine the practical limits of the area you are visiting: what activities are permitted and where (and what are the restrictions that apply).

If you have a firm idea of activities, the appropriate areas for them and the rules that apply, you can pursue desired activities with complete confidence and knowledge.

Hypothermia

The greatest threat to the unprepared winter enthusiast is hypothermia, when prolonged exposure to rain or snowstorms dangerously lowers the body temperature, adversely affecting a person's ability to move and think. Left untreated, hypothermia can cause death. Symptoms of hypothermia include such signs as uncontrollable shivering, slow/vague speech, memory lapses, stumbling and drowsiness. The victim is often not aware of the physical signs they are presenting.

First-aid treatment for hypothermia includes removing the victim from the weather's elements. At the earliest opportunity, strip all wet clothing from the victim. Wrap them in a sleeping bag with another person (also stripped) serving as a body heat donor. Keep the victim awake and give him/her warm drinks. If possible, build a fire to increase the ambient heat around the victim.

Since prevention is the key, put on the rain gear before you get wet and don that wool sweater before you start shivering. Above all, don't get exhausted and know your physical limits.

Most hypothermia cases occur when the air temperature is between 30-50 degrees.

Frostbite

Another danger to those in pursuit of winter recreation is frostbite, when unprotected skin can become damaged due to exposure to below-freezing temperatures. Symptoms include loss of feeling in extremities, especially the hands and feet, and a "stark, white" appearance to the skin.

Treatment includes restoring normal body temperature to the affected area as rapidly as possible. It is not a good idea to warm affected areas by rubbing them, as this might result in either muscle or tissue damage for the injured. Instead, warm the area slowly. In the event signs of frostbite are discovered mid-trip, keep the affected area covered and seek immediate medical treatment.

Avalanches

Snow can start to slide down steep slopes under the right conditions, gathering material and momentum in its journey to the lowest point of gravity. Common avalanche areas include both wide-open steep slopes and narrow clearings. Avoid these paths.

The safest avenues during avalanche threats include ridge tops (on the side toward the wind direction). Valley areas not immediately at the bottom of slopes are the next safest bet. Obey warning signs. If you're not sure about an area, it's best to steer clear of it. Phone ranger stations in the area you are visiting to determine if there are any avalanche warnings in effect.



For More Information...

You can obtain trail maps, winter recreation brochures and other relevant information at the following locations:

Stanislaus Forest Supervisor's Office

19777 Greenley Road
Sonora, CA 95370
(209) 532-3671
TDD: (209) 533-0765

Mi-Wuk Ranger District

24695 Hwy 108
PO Box 100
Mi Wuk Village, CA 95346
(209) 586-3234
TDD: (209) 586-0262

Summit Ranger District

#1 Pinecrest Lake Road
Pinecrest, CA 95364
(209) 965-3434
TDD: (209) 965-0488

Calaveras Ranger District

5519 Hwy 4
PO Box 500
Hathaway Pines, CA 95233
(209) 795-1381
TDD: (209) 795-2854

Groveland Ranger District

24545 Highway 120
Groveland, CA 95321
(209) 962-7825
TDD: (209) 962-6406

For the most up-to-date avalanche information, check the Central Sierra Avalanche Bulletin at:

<http://www.esavalanche.org>

Or, you may call them at (530) 587-2158.



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